
Student responses with examiner commentary

A-level English Language and Literature
Paper 1: Telling Stories 7707/1 Section B

For teaching from September 2015

For assessment from June 2017

Introduction

This collection of resources gives examples of student responses to questions from our A-level English Language and Literature specimen materials, with accompanying examiner commentaries.

The responses in this resource relates to A-level Paper 1: Telling Stories, Section B (Imagined Worlds). Please see the separate resources for examples of student responses, with accompanying examiner commentaries for A-level Paper 1 (Sections A and C) and A-level Paper 2.

(Disclaimer – to be supplied by Marketing. **50 words maximum.**)

Paper 1: Telling Stories (7707/1)

As detailed in the specification (4.1), the aim of the area of study examined in this paper is to allow students to learn how and why stories of different kinds are told, and why stories are 'telling', or valuable, within societies. Students will explore the ways in which writers and speakers present stories and learn how language choices help shape different representations of different worlds and perspectives. This part of the subject content requires students to apply their knowledge to narratives that construct different views of a particular place; prose fiction that constructs imaginary worlds and poetry that constructs a strong sense of personal perspective.

Section B: Imagined Worlds

In Section B, students answer one question from a choice of eight (two questions for each set text). They are presented with a short extract from the set text they have studied and students should refer to both the extract and other relevant points in the novel, when responding to the question. Students will be expected to analyse the language choices made by writers in order to study: point of view; characterisation; presentation or time and space/place and narrative structure. They will also need to consider key aspects of the texts which place them in particular contexts or production and reception.

Question 4:

Read the extract printed below. This is from the section of the novel where Jonathan Harker writes about his coach journey to Dracula's castle.

Explore the significance of Harker's journal in the novel. You should consider:

- the presentation of Harker's point of view in the extract below and throughout the novel
- the use of fantasy elements in constructing a fictional world.

Assessment objective(s) covered:

AO1 (10 marks)

AO2 (10 marks)

AO3 (15 marks)

Total marks available: 35

Student response

Bram Stoker utilises the multiple narrators through the frame of an epistolary novel to create an authentic characterisation of Lucy in 'Dracula', depicting her transition from human to vampire. From the point of view of the other characters, Stoker is able to convey the visual changes in Lucy's physical state, and draw attention to Lucy's own perception of her transition. Furthermore, Stoker contrasts the characterisation of Lucy with Mina to draw attention to the change in Lucy's character during her transition.

The nouns 'shadow' and 'cloud' (used earlier), are used as metaphors of Mina's perception of Lucy, which casts doubt in the reader's mind of the validity of Mina's characterisation. The adverb 'perhaps' is used to present modality in the situation as Mina is unable to narrate for certain the events. Consequently Stoker is presenting Mina as an unreliable narrator; therefore he uses other perspectives to build evidence for the reader to construct in their minds what is actually happening. Ambiguity in characterisation is similarly presented through the narrative perspective of Dr Seward, who uses animal imagery, typical of the gothic/fantasy genre, to describe Lucy's changing appearance and her obvious ill-health. He states, 'her teeth, in dim, uncertain light, seemed longer and longer'.

Stoker depicts Lucy's ill-health here by focusing on it from different perspectives. The role of the damsel in the Gothic genre is shown in Lucy's characterisation through her own narrative; however Mina depicts her as an empowering woman in the night. The antithesis of characterisation reflects the two sides to Lucy that a one-person narrator would struggle to convey, and offers an intriguing insight into the representation of females in the novel. Therefore Stoker uses the multi-person narrative to record her role at this point in the novel.

Examiner Commentary

AO1

The student comments effectively on a range of narrative features: the epistolary framing device used by Stoker, the use of different narrators and points of view, and Mina as a potentially unreliable narrator. There is a very strong focus on metaphor and modality, with detailed and thoughtful points made. The student is able to draw on specific lexical choices used by different narrating and speaking voices in the novel to show how Lucy is presented and begin to examine the significance of her ill health. However, it should be noted that there are a few occasions where comments are not as precise as they could be. For example, 'imagery' is a very vague term; the student should have been more specific, perhaps commenting on the use of metonymy, aspects of clause structure, or the use of base and comparative adjectives in the description of Lucy at this point.

AO2

The student is able to provide a thoughtful and perceptive account of Lucy's presentation in the extract and moves to consider how she is characterised by Stoker in the novel as a whole. She addresses the focus of ill health and explores this within the broad frame of Lucy's physical change and how this is relayed to us through different narrating voices. Examples are for the most part precisely chosen and very well-explained.

AO3

There are perceptive points made both on the gothic genre, aspects of fantasy (vampirism and the human form changing) and the representation of female characters in particular. These points are integrated into a good understanding of how Stoker uses forms and conventions to shape his characters and the fictional world of the novel.

Question 8:

Read the extract printed below. This is from the section of the novel where Susie describes her mother.

Explore the significance of the mother-daughter relationship between Abigail and Susie in the novel. You should consider:

- the presentation of their relationship in the extract below and at different points of the novel
- the use of fantasy elements in constructing a fictional world.

Assessment objective(s) covered:

AO1 (10 marks)

AO2 (10 marks)

AO3 (15 marks)

Total marks available: 35

Student response

Sebold represents Abigail as a character with two clashing personalities: that of her responsibility as mother – and the relationship that she has with Susie - and her desire to do things for herself. This conflict between selflessness and selfishness represents a typical conflict of late twentieth century and early twenty first century feminism – the incompatibility of domesticated and personal independence, and whether one is more important than the other.

Susie's fantastical narrative where she is able to move backwards and forwards in time shows how her relationship with her mother was framed within Abigail's desire to maintain a motherly role and her own identity. Sebold places Abigail telling stories of 'Persephone and Zeus' to Susie and Lindsey next to her remark about her determination to get a 'master's in English' and some possible career in her own right once the children had grown up. Sebold uses the narrative of bathtime to create a changing, inconstant characterisation that highlights the intimacy of Abigail's time with her daughters, where they talk of 'boys that teased us' but also, in Susie's eyes, marks how dedicating her time to motherhood meant that many of Abigail's own dreams remained unfulfilled. This is a recurring theme throughout the novel and is highlighted by Susie in many places, for example remarking to Franny in chapter 3 that she misses her mother, and then commenting on the significance of the photograph in the same chapter of the 'mother-stranger'. Given that Susie is narrating outside of the events themselves, we see that her experiences inform what she sees are Abigail's wants and desires. This shapes the novel since the reader sees Susie observe rather than partake in experiences.

Susie's narration highlights the various feelings she has about her relationship with Abigail. She now views her time with her mother, and her mother herself, as less of a mystery than when she was younger, and her narrative as a ghost is able to draw on knowledge about Abigail and about their relationship that was previously unavailable to her. The parallel clauses later in the episode 'She got lost in her story, I got lost in her talk' are significant in trying to understand what bedtime meant to Abigail and Susie then, and what of course it means to Susie now thinking back on their time together. However, there is a degree of uncertainty expressed in Susie's voice, whether intentional or simply the problem of remembering back through time, 'Those bath times blur together', where the deixis 'those' positions Susie as sadly removed from the events that she is now retelling.

Examiner Commentary

AO1

The student maintains a very secure and interesting focus on the way in which Abigail is presented through Susie's narrative, and what this suggests about their relationship. She pays good attention to language and structure, with precise, accurate and thoughtful comments on point of view, speech and thought, clause structure and deixis.

AO2

An excellent understanding of Abigail is demonstrated together with some subtle observations about the relationship between Susie and her mother. The student pulls apart the complex nature of characterisation, and comments sensitively on Susie's remembering of and attitude towards her Abigail. She makes insightful points on Susie's role as an observer and narrator in the novel, and comments on the potential unreliability associated with these roles. The relationship between mother and daughter, and Abigail's dual identity as mother and individual in her own right are explored. She is able to focus beyond the extract to draw on appropriate further episodes and examples.

AO3

The student comments on the novel in the context of contemporary concerns about female identity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and explores how and the novel as a literary form is able to address these. There are comments on elements of the fantasy genre evident in Susie's role as narrator and the privileged position she occupies in moving between the fictional notions of heaven and earth.

Version 0.1

First published (12/02/2015)

Last updated (12/02/2015)